

Out With the Old, In With the New

New Construction Begins at Eastern Senior High School

BY KYLE JOHNSON

Demolition work is almost complete, the asbestos and other hazardous materials are nearly finished being sealed in boxes and shipped off for proper disposal, and the old Eastern Senior High School is ready for the face-lift to begin.

Construction crews started working on the second and third floors of the school, getting the frames in place to rebuild class walls and add modern touches to the 86-year-old building. A new window will be installed in a demonstration classroom soon, and the classroom will be completed later this year. That classroom will be used for review purposes, allowing school officials to ensure that that is the classroom model they truly want throughout the building.

A demonstration will also be wrapped up soon on the original terra-cotta floors in many of the building's hallways. The plan is to clean up a test area of the flooring before work begins to refurbish all of the terra-cotta.

The hazardous material in the original building will be completely out of the school later this year. That material is sealed in a bag, placed in a box and shipped offsite for disposal.

A spokesperson for the Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization said that recycling old materials is an important part of the Eastern renovation. Items such as lockers will be reused elsewhere, while wood and

metal items will be sent to facilities to be recycled.

Another Academic Option?

Last month, this column highlighted the long-running health academy that will be maintained and expanded when the new academic program at Eastern is finalized. Another academic option frequently mentioned by DC Public Schools officials is the International Baccalaureate (IB) program.

IB “aims to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect,” according to IB’s mission statement.

Individual schools create IB programs, which are then accredited by organization officials. IB offers three different programs for students ages 3-19, with a diploma program for high school juniors and seniors. Member high schools can opt for the diploma program or offer individual IB courses, similar to how AP courses are offered at some high schools.

Jesse Nickelsen of the DCPS Office of Portfolio Management said that IB prefers schools to implement the diploma program, which consists of courses in six subject areas – English, second language, individuals and societies, experimental sciences, mathematics and computer science, and the arts.

“It’s not a by-the-num-



Eastern 1 and 2: New construction on Eastern High School has begun. Construction workers will wrap up a “demonstration classroom” later this year, and the school remodeling will wrap up next summer. Photo: Kyle Johnson

bers program,” Nickelsen said of IB at an academic planning meeting in September. “The goal is to create an environment where the students and teachers aspire to something larger.”

The student courses are of a “high rigor” and develop critical thinking skills in students, he said, with lengthy essays and out-of-class work required. Being an IB school would also allow Eastern’s teachers to communicate with their teaching counterparts throughout the world. Nickelsen said that teachers could ask for advice on how to teach subjects, for example.

Students successfully completing the program would receive two diplomas – one from Eastern and one from IB. Securing that second diploma could open up more scholarship and grant opportunities for students going on to college as well.

However, being an IB school is not cheap or easy. The staff would be required to attend IB training, Eastern would pay an annual fee (Nickelsen said it was \$9,000) and each exam would cost \$53. That exam cost would add up quickly because each student would take two exams per IB course. DCPS would likely pursue some private funding if an IB program is developed, Nickelsen said.

Building an IB program from scratch takes some time as well. Nickelsen, who helped create an IB program at Benjamin Banneker High School, suggested three years is a reasonable guess for Eastern. That timeframe means that the program would gain certification just before the first junior class starts school in fall 2012.

Not an Honors Program

If an IB program is pursued, its role at Eastern could take a variety of shapes. DCPS could make the program an academy, similar to how the health academy will be structured. If that is the case, Nickelsen said at least 10 percent of the students would be in the academy, ideally. Students in other academies could potentially take an IB course or two on the side as well.

Another option would be to have the whole school adopt an IB platform.

Charity Fesler of the DCPS Of-

fice of Portfolio Management said creating an IB academy could result in a de facto honors program.

“We don’t want to set up a situation where one of the academies is perceived as being more rigorous than the other two,” she said.

Fesler said that ideally all academies will be of a high rigor and that any IB involvement would strengthen teaching throughout all programs at the school.

Suzanne Wells of the Capitol Hill Public School Parent Organization said that adopting an IB program would make a lot of sense for Eastern. Wells has a niece in a Colorado public high school with IB courses.

“I’m hopeful that they’re serious about including that in the newly opened Eastern,” she said. “I think an IB program could attract families to the school.”

Discussion with the Boss

Fesler said that the IB option will be one of the topics discussed at a Nov. 16 open community forum. The location of that meeting had not been finalized when the Hill Rag went to print.

School officials will present some “concrete models” – ranging from actual schools to a hypothetical school with the academic options DCPS is examining for Eastern. One of those models will include a look at the IB program within the context of the health sciences academy.

Fesler said showing some detailed examples of academic programs will help the community members get a better idea of what’s on the table and will help DCPS prepare for finalizing its academic planning.

“We need to start getting down into some of the nuts and bolts of it,” she said.


In early December, academic planning officials will have a conversation with DCPS Chancellor Michelle Rhee to provide an update on planning. Fesler said that meeting will help to clarify the rest of the planning process.

More information on academic planning for Eastern is available at the DCPS website, <http://dcps.dc.gov>. Under the “Parents and Community” tab on the homepage, click on “The Future of Eastern High School.” ★

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